

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 15, 2019

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
135 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

We are writing to urge you to provide at least the \$701.532 million provided in Fiscal Year 2019 in Mental Health Block Grant appropriations for FY 2020, and to consider adding an additional \$35 million to cover the cost of co-occurring mental illnesses among individuals suffering substance use disorders, particularly opioid use disorders.

There is an urgent need to strengthen our nation's public mental health safety net. Recent funding increases have helped states implement evidence-based early intervention programs for First Episode Psychosis (FEP), and other early interventions designed to address mental illness further upstream. These programs help to strengthen the odds of patient recovery and full integration in the community, and have the further benefit of reducing public costs, including federal expenditures.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), about 100,000 adolescents and young adults in the United States experience first episode psychosis each year -- an early indicator of severe mental illness. Current law requires that every state now fund FEP programs to reduce the duration of untreated psychosis. In turn, early treatment often means a better recovery. State mental health agencies with limited state budgets rely on federal resources to fund FEP programs while also sustaining existing programs.

In addition, state-implemented measures such as bed registries and crisis intervention programs help to divert or free individuals from hospital emergency rooms where they often remain for long periods of time awaiting admission to appropriate psychiatric care and of which they often become repeat users. Recent studies found that approximately 50 percent of frequent emergency department (ED) users have a mental health diagnosis and the group has higher rates of morbidity and mortality and incurs higher medical costs over time. A study published in October

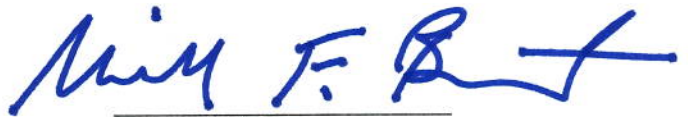
2018 in JAMA Emergency Medicine found that a primary diagnosis of mental health was associated with a higher rate of repeat use of the emergency room. Furthermore, as the severity of the mental health diagnosis increased, there was an increase in the associated number of future ED visits. Combined, a patient with a primary mental health diagnosis and a severe mental health diagnosis like schizophrenia would be predicted to have more than twice as many visits as a patient without any mental health diagnoses. The 2018 study found a consistent increase in the rate of ED visits as mental illness severity increased from mild to moderate to severe. Additionally, the lack of adequate community-based mental health services for adults causes people with mental illness to be diverted into the criminal justice system, where they often fail to receive necessary services and face conditions that further traumatize them and stigmatize their condition.

We thank you for your attention to this important matter, and appreciate that last year the committee agreed to increase the Community Mental Health Block Grant by \$160 million. Continuing to support robust Community Mental Health Block Grant funding will enable states and community providers to respond to the ever-tight fiscal situation always impacting state public mental health systems nationwide and the federal government and Congress to contain or even reduce public healthcare costs.

Sincerely,



Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



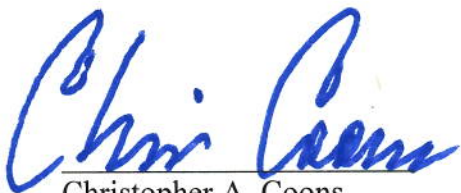
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United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator



Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



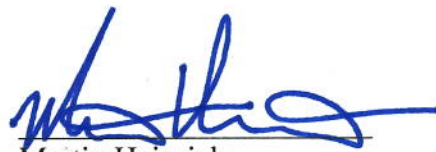
Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



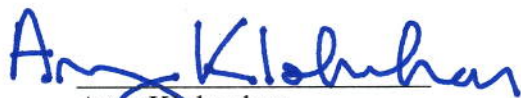
Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator



Mazie Hirono  
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Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



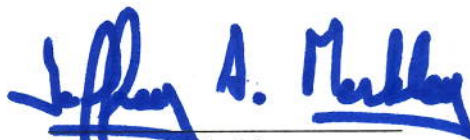
Amy Klobuchar  
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Joe Manchin III  
United States Senator

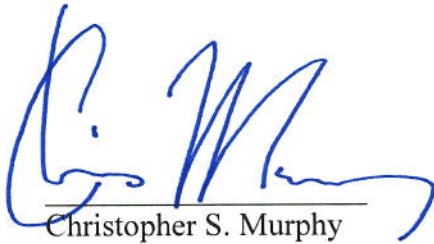


Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

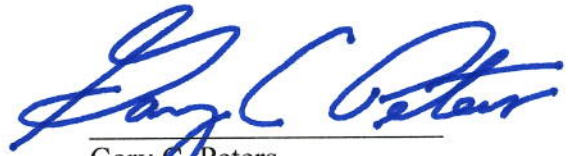


Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator





Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator



Jack Reed  
United States Senator



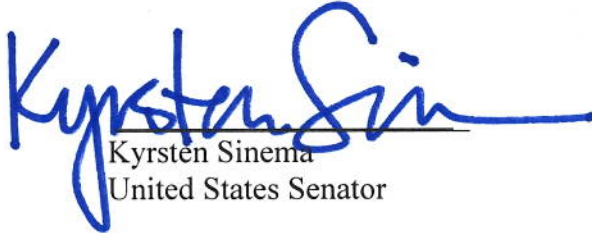
Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator




Brian Schatz  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema  
United States Senator



Tina Smith  
United States Senator



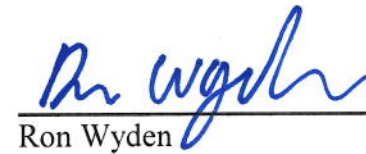
Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator